



CATAWBA COUNTY

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LOCAL FAMILY DESCRIBES ADOPTION EXPERIENCE

HICKORY, N.C. — Dennis and Laura Davis have a big family, and that's just the way they want it.

The Conover couple recently adopted two sisters, increasing their family to five children. "I grew up wanting to be a foster or adoptive parent," explained Laura, 31. As a child, she knew several foster and adoptive families and saw the difference it could make in a child's life to have a loving and stable family. Dennis, 42, had a childhood friend who was adopted but never considered the possibility of becoming an adoptive parent until he and Laura married.



Laura and Dennis Davis of Conover recently adopted two sisters, bringing their family to a total of five children. There are many more children in Catawba County waiting for an adoptive or foster family. For more information about becoming a foster care parent or adoptive parent, contact Sybil Good of Family Builders at sgood@catawbacountync.gov or 828-466-5118.

Laura holds a degree in human and community service and a minor in psychology from Lenoir-Rhyne University. She worked at a group home for about a year, but had to quit due to scheduling conflicts. She is now a customer service representative for Klingspor Abrasives. Dennis is a production worker with Rock Tenn. Both Dennis and Laura emphasized that both parents need to be fully committed to the adoption process to be successful.

The couple has three biological children: two daughters, ages 9 and 7, who are Laura's children from a previous marriage, and their 2-year-old son.

They originally signed up to become foster parents, taking a comprehensive course in parenting offered by Family Builders of Catawba Valley, the foster and adoption agency of Catawba County Social Services. They had to undergo

criminal background checks and a home inspection. In fact, the whole family was assessed to make sure any children coming into the home would be safe.

The process normally takes six to 12 months. Dennis works a swing shift. Due to his irregular schedule, staff from Family Builders had to provide a few extra classes just for him. After completing the process, the Davises were licensed as foster parents.

The first foster care children who were placed with them, in 2008, were a teenage girl and her baby. After they left foster care, the Davises were asked if they would be willing to foster two sisters with the possibility of adopting them later. They readily agreed.

Whenever possible, Family Builders tries to place siblings together. In May of 2010, a 4-year-old girl came to live with them. Later that year, the family welcomed her 6-year-old sister.

The couple said their biological children immediately accepted the two girls as family members. The Davises were aware that one of the girls had some emotional and academic problems, but said that did not affect their decision.

Soon after adopting the two sisters, one was diagnosed as autistic. Laura said the diagnosis did not change their feelings about the adoption. "Just like a biological child is a gift from God and unique in their own ways, so are adoptive children," she said. "This diagnosis, or any others, would not have impacted our decision to adopt the sisters. Dennis and I felt strongly that unless there was a safety issue that the siblings should remain together and our love for the girls would not change."

The Davises said they feel it is easier to address each child's unique needs when the child understands that the adoption is permanent. They will not be moved from one family to another. For example, when playing with toys, the child understands "some of this stuff is mine. I'm not just borrowing it for a few weeks."

Dennis said, "It can be very, very rewarding (to adopt), but you have to be prepared to deal with the system." Court rulings can often be confusing for children and parents alike, he said.

The first priority of Family Builders is to reunite foster children with their biological family. If that is not possible, adoption by another relative is the second choice. If neither of these options is available, the child can be adopted by parents who are not biologically related. The purpose is to provide a loving safe home with the least disruption for the child, according to Sybil Good, an adoption supervisor.

The Davises said they would be open to adopting another child, but state foster home licensing regulations limit a family to no more than five children. However, they challenged others to consider the possibility. The Davises were present when the Catawba County Commission proclaimed November as Adoption Awareness Month.

"A child can't grab hold of anything until they know they aren't going anywhere," Dennis said in explaining the psychological benefits of adoption. "We've done what we can — but we know there are so many children who need quality foster parents or adoptive parents."

For more information about how to foster or adopt a child, contact Sybil Good of Family Builders at sgood@catawbacountync.gov or 828-466-5118. More information is also available on the Family Builders Web site at <http://www.familybuilderscv.org>.

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